

First Millennium BC and First Century AD Pottery from Kensington

The Sir John Atkins Building and
Phillimore's assemblages

by
Mike Seager Thomas



Mike Seager Thomas
Artefact Services
Lewes
mseagerthomas@gmail.com
<http://artefactservices.webs.com/>

Technical report 8

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(texts commissioned by Pre-Construct Archaeology)

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1. Introduction

As only the second stratified assemblage of prehistoric pottery to have been recovered from the Kensington area, the present assemblage provides a welcome opportunity to examine a range of associated Greater London prehistoric pottery forms and fabrics. Such study is essential if we are fully to understand the development of the region during the period, for, by adding to our detailed knowledge of Greater London prehistoric pottery, it improves its chronological resolution and so helps contextualize the sites that yielded it. The prehistoric assemblage comprises 163 sherds weighing 1721 grams. Many of these are from Roman or later contexts or belong to small context assemblages only, but sufficient were associated for the group as a whole to be interpretatively useful. On the basis of its internal associations — both fabric and typological — and comparisons with pottery from other sites it can be shown to belong to two widely separated prehistoric periods, transitional Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age (*hereafter* LBA/EIA), dated to around the seventh century BC, and Middle to Late Iron Age (*hereafter* MIA, later IA and LIA), dated to the last centuries BC and the first century AD. Overall it indicates a significant, if interrupted, occupation of the site during the later prehistoric period.

2. Method of Study

The pottery was analyzed using the pottery recording system recommended by the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (1992). All sherds were ascribed a fabric type on the basis of macroscopic examination. These were counted and weighed to the nearest whole gram and each diagnostic sherd was assigned to morphological/decorative and technological type. Dating of fabrics was by association with chronologically diagnostic feature sherds and other, associated fabrics.

3. Interpretative Context

The earlier of the two prehistoric groups represented in the Sir John Atkins Building assemblage comprises pottery belonging to a late phase of the post Deverel-Rimbury (*hereafter* PDR) pottery tradition. For the Thames Valley this tradition has been discussed in detail by Barrett (1980). The published Greater London site assemblages to which the present group is most closely related are those from Snowy Fielder Lane, Isleworth (Timby 1996), and

Heathrow Airport (Canham 1978). A PDR assemblage from the Phillimores in Campden Hill Road is slightly earlier ([Appendix 1](#)). Locally relevant later IA traditions have been discussed by Harding (1972), Cunliffe (1991) and Thompson (1982). Published Greater London site assemblages incorporating later IA pottery analogous to that from the Sir John Atkins Building come from Bermondsey (Sidell *et al.* 2002) and Heathrow Airport (Canham 1978). No contemporary material is known from the Kensington area. Owing to the lack of published prehistoric pottery from Greater London, the following discussion is based largely upon the assemblage's internal relationships and comparisons with typologically/fabric similar pottery from the immediately surrounding counties.

4. Fabric Analysis

4.1 Summary

The assemblage comprises 10 fabric types. The principal inclusion types present are burnt flint, quartz sand, and shell. Five fabric types occur in chronologically diagnostic forms, have closely dated regional parallels, or were consistently associated on site with typologically dated material. One belongs to the LBA/EIA only and four to the later IA only. The LBA/EIA fabric type comprises a very coarse ware, the later IA fabric types fine, intermediate and coarse wares. The remaining five fabric types, which include both intermediate and coarse wares, have LBA/EIA and later IA parallels in off-site assemblages. Accordingly, none can be dated precisely. The forms in which they occur on site, however, strongly suggest that in the Sir John Atkins Building assemblage they are of earlier rather than later first millennium BC date. Fabrics from features with prehistoric *termini post quem* are quantified in [Table 1](#), fabrics from features with Romano-British or later *termini post quem* in [Table 2](#).

4.2 Early first millennium BC fabric

The single unequivocally LBA/EIA fabric, F1, is very coarsely flint-tempered. The present writer is unaware of Greater London parallels for it but similar coarse wares occur in unpublished PDR assemblages from both Kent and north Surrey (Kent: Highstead, Iwade and Kingsnorth; Surrey: Ottways Lane, Ashted). It is dated to the LBA/EIA because of the Sir John Atkins Building PDR assemblage's late typology and because of the sandiness of both it and the fabrics with which it was associated ([Table 1](#)), a characteristic of other Thames Valley late PDR assemblages (O'Connell 1986, 61–2; Barclay 1995, 10) (and indeed late PDR assemblages from outside the region). Significantly, the fabrics comprising the earlier Phillimores assemblage are much less sandy.

Coarse flint (F1)

Moderate (10-15%) medium sand sized to small pebble sized burnt flint and sparse (c. 7%) medium quartz sand.

4.3 First millennium BC sp. fabrics

This group comprises sandy flint-tempered fabrics (F2 and F3), sandy fabrics (Q1) and sandy shell-tempered fabrics (S1 and S2). With fabric F1 it forms a typical Thames Valley late PDR fabric group. But as well as having PDR parallels, individual fabrics within it have good later IA parallels. Fabrics similar to F2, for example, occurred at Bigbury in Kent (Thompson 1983, 261–3), Copse Farm, Oving, in West Sussex (Hamilton 1985, 222), and Ashford Prison, Staines (Seager Thomas 2006).

Fill		50	91	94	117	123	129	109	137	151	Fabric date			
Cut		N/A	92	95	118	124	130	110	138	152				
Fabric/ number of sherds/ weight in grams	F1	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0				
		0	0	73	0	0	0	0	0	0				
	F2	0	2	23	2	0	5	0	2	0				
		0	4	136	8	0	17	0	7	0				
	F3	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	1	0				
		0	1	28	0	0	0	0	13	0				
	Q1	2	1	2	0	1	4	2	1	0				
		5	1	23	0	1	3	43	8	0				
	S1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0				
		0	0	5	0	0	0	29	0	0				
	S2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0				
		0	0	2	0	0	0	16	0	0				
	Q2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<u>1</u>				
		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<u>23</u>				
	Q2F	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0				
		0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0				
	S3	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	<u>2</u>	0				
		0	0	0	0	0	0	<u>16</u>	<u>24</u>	0				
	Fe	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	1	0				
		0	0	0	0	0	0	53	18	0				
Context TPQ	LBA/EIA													
							Later IA							

Table 1. Quantification and dating of pottery from contexts with prehistoric *termini post quem*. *Italics* = sherd groups incorporating Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age feature sherds; underlined = sherd groups incorporating later Iron Age feature sherds.

Medium flint (F2).

Sparse (5–7%) medium to coarse sand sized burnt flint and rare to sparse (1–5%) (not easily quantifiable) medium to quartz sand.

Fine flint (F3).

Sparse (*c.* 5%) medium sand sized burnt flint and rare to sparse (1–5%) (not easily quantifiable) medium to quartz sand. Some sandy sherds very hard fired.

Medium quartz sand (Q1).

Moderate to common (15–25%) medium quartz sand.

Shell and medium quartz sand (S1).

Rare to sparse (2–3%) medium to coarse sand sized platy shell and sparse (c. 7%) medium quartz sand.

Shell (S2).

Common (20–25%) medium to coarse sand size platy shell and decalcified/burnt out platy voids and some (unquantifiable) quartz sand.

Fill	Prehistoric sherds			Context TPQ
	Qty	Weight in grams	Fabric/form	
2	4	13	F2, F3	PM
3	2	9	F2 (Fig. X.1), F3	PM
52	3	5	Q1	ERB
62	32	824	F1, F2 (Fig. X.3), Q1, Q2 (Figs X.8, X.9 and X.10)	RB/PM
64	1	2	Q1	PM
70	5	134	F2 (Fig. X.2), F3	PM
101	6	25	F2, F3, Fe/U	RB
136	12	53	F1, F2	ERB
145	12	90	F2, Q1, Fe/U	RB

Table 2. Quantification of prehistoric pottery from features with early Romano-British or later *termini post quem*.

4.4 Later Iron Age fabrics

The later IA fabrics also have parallels in assemblages belonging to other prehistoric periods. Two of them, however, occur in later IA form and the remainder came from features that yielded later IA forms. Earliest is a fine sandy fabric, Q2, which dates to the Middle Iron Age. Once again the present writer is unaware of exact local parallels for it but its dating here is supported by the occurrence of a similar fabric, and similar forms to those in which it occurred in Kensington, in a MIA group in aforementioned Ashford Prison assemblage. The remaining fabrics, S3, which is shelly, and Fe/U, which is untempered but occasionally sideritic, both of which were stratified above Q2, and Q2F, a flint-tempered variant of Q2, may all be slightly later. Fabrics similar to S3 occur in LIA to early Romano-British assemblages from Ewell (Cotton 2001, 11–12), Southwark and Bigbury (Thompson 1983, 261–3), and fabrics similar to the sideritic variant of Fe/U in MIA assemblages from Ashford Prison and Ottways Lane, Ashted (Seager Thomas 2002; 2006).

Shell with fine quartz sand (S3).

Sparse (5%) medium to coarse sand platy sized shell and decalcified/burnt out platy voids and common (>25%) fine to medium quartz sand.

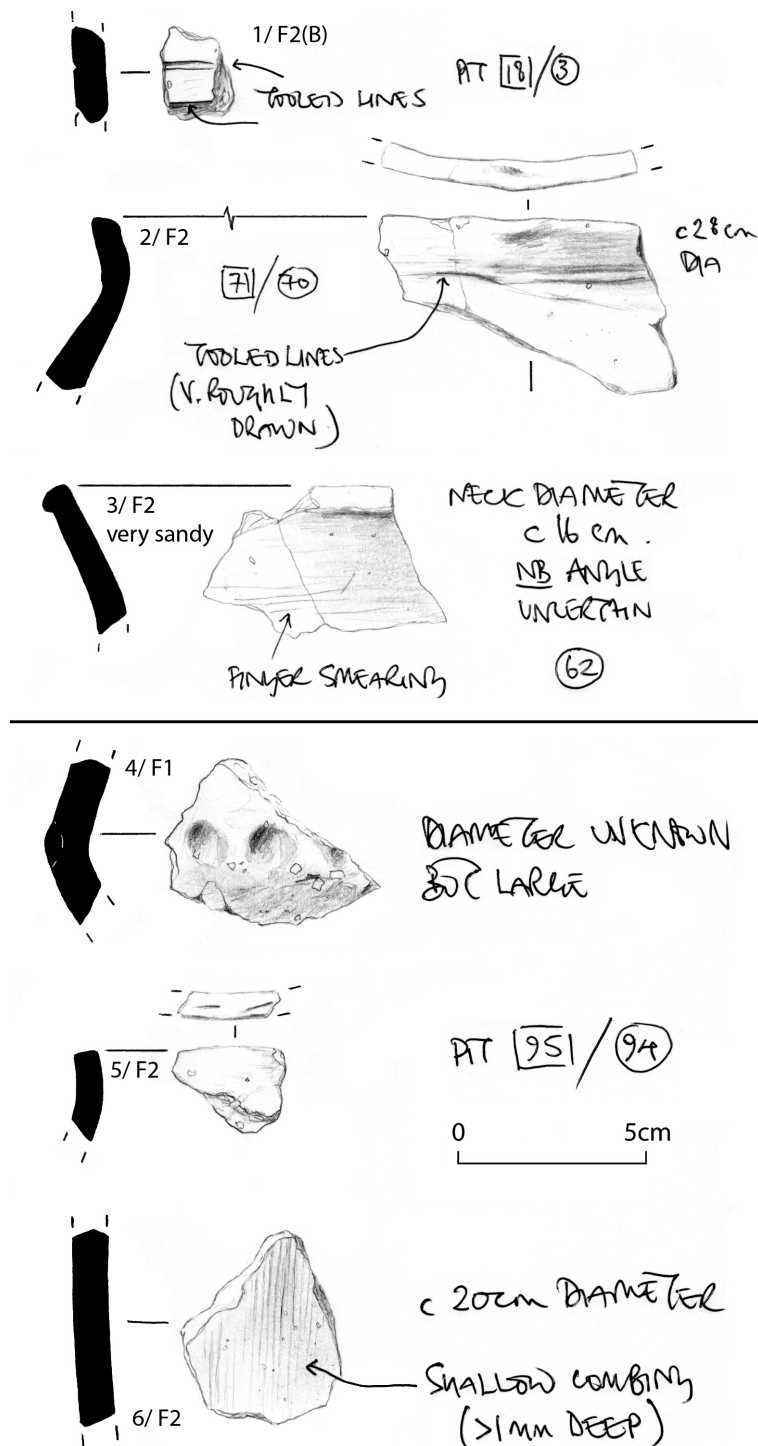


Figure 1. Post Deverel-Rimbury (LBA/EIA) pottery from the Sir John Atkins Building

Fine quartz sand (Q2).

Very common (>30%) fine quartz sand. Burnished.

Fine quartz sand and fine flint (Q2F).

Rare (1%) medium sand sized burnt flint and very common (>30%) fine quartz sand. Burnished.

Untempered (Fe/U).

Untempered fabric with (occasionally) rare to sparse (3-5%) siderite nodules and sparse to moderate (not easily quantifiable) fine to medium quartz sand.

5. Pottery typology

5.1 Early first millennium BC pottery

A single group of feature sherds belonging to the PDR pottery tradition comes from pit 95 (Fig. 1.4–6). It includes a heavily-gritted base (in fabric F1: not illustrated), a finger-nail impressed rim, the angular, finger-tip impressed shoulder of a shouldered jar and a combed body sherd. Feature sherds were also residual in pits 18 and 71, and the plough-soil (Fig. 1.1–3). Although combing and heavily-gritted bases were long-lived, collectively, the ‘decorated’ forms which comprise most of these sherds are characteristic of later rather than earlier PDR traditions. Parallels for them are present in both of the Greater London late PDR assemblages referred to above (e.g. Timby 1996, fig. 6), and they occur in assemblages from proximate regional sites such as Petter’s Sports Field, Egham (O’Connell 1986, figs 42–5), and Orsett causewayed enclosure (Barrett 1978, fig. 41). Radiocarbon dates associated with ‘decorated’ PDR pottery focus on the seventh century cal BC or the LBA/EIA (Needham 1996, 137). This makes the present assemblage slightly later than that from the nearby Phillimore’s site.

5.2 Later first millennium BC and early first century BC pottery

The later IA assemblage comprises two stratigraphically distinct groups, one from pit 152, and one from ditch 138. Pit 152 yielded a sherd from a bead rim jar in fabric Q2 (Fig. 2.7). Associated with this by fabric and tradition, and perhaps originating in the same feature, are two further jars from the ploughsoil (Figs 2.8 and 2.10). One of these vessels is paralleled in an assemblage from Bermondsey, where it is dated to the MIA (Sidell *et al.* 2001, fig. 39), and all three have parallels in later IA assemblages from outside Greater London. Key amongst the latter is Bigbury where vessels similar to all three forms are associated with early grog-tempered wares (Thompson 1983, figs 11–12). These date to the first part of the LIA. Also notable are parallels in a slightly earlier dated (MIA) assemblage from Cassington, in Oxfordshire (Harding 1972, plate 61). Ditch 138, which cut pit 152, yielded a completely different fabric suit. The only feature sherd from it was a closed-mouth jar in fabric S3 (Fig. 3.11). Typologically it too is paralleled at Bigbury but jars of its approximate type in shell-tempered fabrics occur widely in, or, as in Kensington, below early Romano-British assemblages.

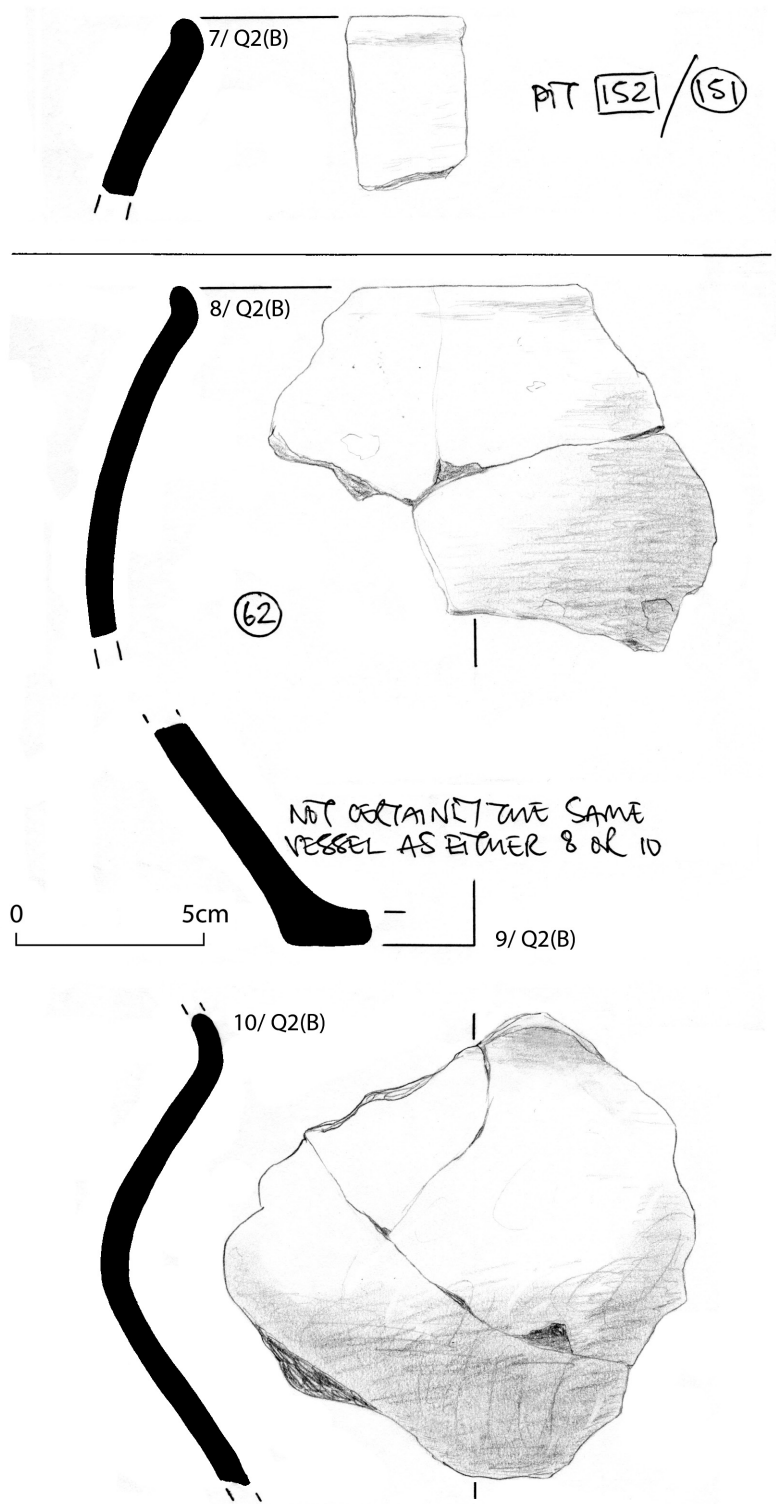


Figure 2. Middle Iron Age pottery from the Sir John Atkins Building

Their Romano-British associations probably place them in the first century AD.

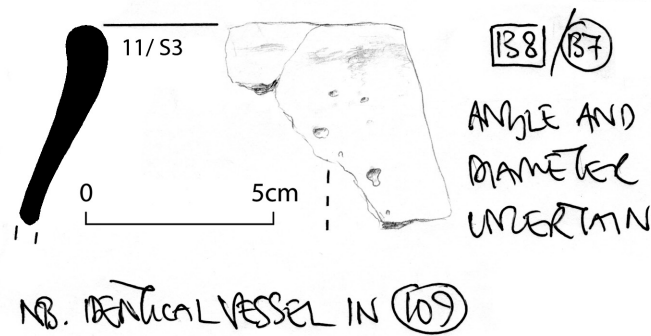


Figure 3. Late Iron Age pot from the Sir John Atkins Building

6. Catalogue of illustrated sherds

5.1 Post Deverel-Rimbury pottery

1. Body sherd with tooled linear decoration (two parallel lines). *Fabric F2*. Possible exterior burnish. Dark grey core and exterior surface and orange brown interior surface. Fill 3, pit 18.
2. Upper shoulder and straight, slightly flared neck and squared, finger-tip impressed rim of shouldered jar. Rim diameter c 28cm. *Fabric F2*. Light red brown core and orange surfaces. Fill 70, pit 71.
3. Slightly concave ?flared neck of shouldered jar with externally expanded rim. *Fabric F2/Q1*. Finger smeared. Dark grey core and dark grey to dark brown surfaces. Layer 62.
4. Angular finger-tip impressed shoulder of large (un-measurable) diameter shouldered jar. *Fabric F1*. Smeared surfaces. Dark grey core and dark grey to red brown surfaces. Fill 94, pit 95.
5. Upright neck and squared, finger-nail impressed rim of possible shouldered jar. *Fabric F2*. Brown core and dark grey brown surfaces. Fill 94, pit 95.
6. Combed body sherd. *Fabric F2*. Dark grey core, dark grey exterior surface, and buff exterior surface. Fill 94, pit 95.

6.2 Later Iron Age pottery

7. Convex upper shoulder and bead rim of closed mouth jar. *Fabric Q2*. Burnished exterior. Grey core, dark brown exterior margin, and dark grey (mostly) to light brown surfaces. Fill 151, pit 152.
8. Convex upper shoulder and rounded, out-turned rim/vestigial neck of closed-mouth jar. Rim diameter c 16cm. *Fabric Q2*. Burnished exterior surface. Grey to dark brown core and dark grey surfaces. Layer 62.

9. Flat base belonging to vessel 7, 8 or vessel 10. Base diameter 10cm. *Fabric Q2*. Burnished interior and exterior surfaces. Grey core, dark brown exterior margin, and dark grey surfaces. Layer 62.
10. Rounded shoulder and convex to concave upper shoulder and out-turned neck of everted rim jar. Shoulder diameter c 20cm. *Fabric Q2*. Burnished interior and exterior surfaces. Grey core, dark grey to red brown exterior surface, and dark grey core. Layer 62.
11. Very slightly convex upper shoulder and rounded, upright, internally thickened rim/vestigial neck of closed mouth jar. Rim diameter c 14cm. *Fabric S3*. Brown core and orange surfaces. Fill 137, ditch 138.

7. Importance of the assemblage

When we look at the early first millennium BC pottery using activity in the area, two things immediately stand out. The first is that while Kensington was occupied for an extended period, it was not occupied in any one area continuously. By contrast, the later IA/ early Romano-British occupation displayed considerable continuity. The second is that, although settlement was not continuous in any one area, the pottery identifying it — both at the Sir John Atkins Building and at the Phillimore's — fits well into a far-ranging and developing tradition, even to the extent of the fabrics comprising it. Although isolated spatially, early first millennium BC Kensington was not isolated culturally.

No doubt shifting settlement was part of the same culture. This pattern is consistent with evidence from many sites outside Greater London which show shifting settlement at this period to be the norm.

Finally, for the later IA, the importance of the assemblage lies in the resolution within it of pottery belonging to two sequential groups, one dated to the MIA and one to LIA/ early Romano British period.¹ At the Sir John Atkins Building site the two phases can be seen in the cutting of pit 152 by ditch 138, but for other sites locally, which may lack such relationships, it provides a clear sequence against which the pottery from these sites, and by extension the sites themselves, can be compared.

(January 2003)

¹ A point that somehow escaped from the published version of this report.

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Appendix 1. Rare prehistoric pottery from the Kensington area

by Mike Seager Thomas & Sue Hamilton

The pottery assemblage from The Phillimores ([Table 3](#)) includes the first dateable prehistoric sherds to be recovered archaeologically from the Kensington area. Three fabric types can be distinguished.

Fabric 1

Rare to sparse (2–3%) well-rounded, multi-coloured medium (0.25–0.5mm) quartz sand. Rare (<1%) coarse sand-sized (0.5–1mm) red Fe oxide nodules. Rare (2%) medium to coarse (0.5–1.5mm) white angular quartz or flint. Dark red oxidized exterior surface, dark grey unoxidized interior surfaces and core.

Fabric 2

Sparse (7%) medium sand-sized to small granule-sized (0.3–3mm) grey and white calcined flint grit. Rare to sparse (2–3%) fine (0.25) quartz sand. Red oxidized exterior surface, dark grey unoxidized interior surfaces and core.

Fabric 3

Moderate (10%) coarse sand-sized to large granule-sized (1–4mm) grey calcined flint grit. Rare (1–2%) fine (<0.25mm) quartz sand. Red to buff oxidized exterior surfaces, dark grey unoxidized interior surfaces and core.

Context 131, apparently a primary deposit of burnt flint, yielded 41 sherds. These derive from a small shouldered jar. Both typologically and in terms of its fabric (*F3*), this can be dated to the early first millennium BC (LBA). The sherds comprising it are abraded and there are few conjoins between them, but the completeness of the vessel, the nature of context 131, and the absence of later finds suggest that both vessel and context are coeval. Individual sherds from contexts 94 and 110 belong to two further vessels. Both are small and abraded and need not date the contexts, which yielded them. That from context 94 is in a fabric (*F2*) similar to that comprising the vessel from context 131 and probably belongs to the same ceramic tradition. The sherd from context 110 does not. Owing to its small size and isolation, it is difficult to date with certainty, but in terms of fabric and thickness it resembles some medieval wares. Such a date would be consistent with the stratigraphically late position of context 110.

Context no.	Fabric	No of sherds	Weight	No of vessels represented	Date
94	2	1	4	1	LBA
110	1	1	2	1	medieval
131	3	41	196	1	LBA

Table 3. Quantification of pottery from The Phillimores

The shouldered jar

The principal vessel from The Phillimores is a small, weakly-shouldered jar (Fig. 4). Its original surface is difficult to reconstruct but it was oxidized (there is no evidence that this results from burning post-firing) and, given its coarse fabric, it is likely always to have been rough. Shouldered jars of its general form, albeit somewhat larger, are a frequent and widespread component of the post Deverel-Rimbury ceramic tradition. They are dated by a large number of ^{14}C associations to the early first millennium BC (Barrett 1980, 311; Needham 1996, 134–7). Within this tradition rounded or slack shoulders are characteristic of early assemblages, whereas body decoration is considered later. Both of these traits occur in the vessel from The Phillimores and make more precise dating difficult. Probably, however, it falls somewhere in the ninth century, the likely date of its closest, well-contextualized parallel (Runnymede Bridge: Longley 1991: 78.15). This makes it broadly contemporary with Ewart Park metalwork, which comprises the nearby Kensington Church hoard (*vide* O'Connor 1980).

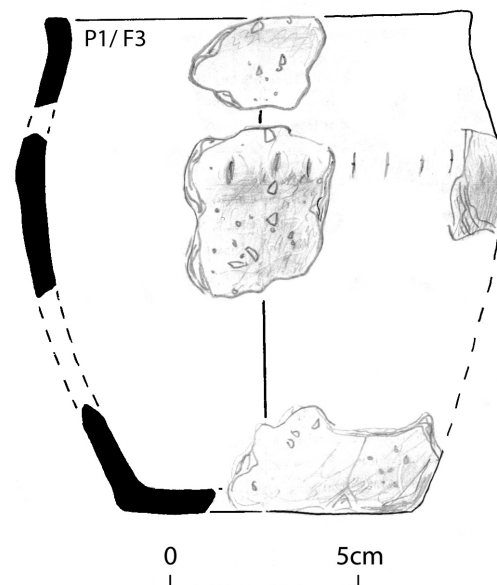


Figure 4. Post Deverel-Rimbury (LBA) shouldered jar from The Phillimores

Owing to the sparsity of prehistoric finds from the area, any assemblage — particularly if stratified — is of importance. Apart from providing a new dot on the distribution maps of Bronze Age London, two related themes are of interest. Firstly, the direct association of early first millennium BC pottery with a primary deposit of burnt flint places an obviously prehistoric but otherwise poorly dated category of feature in a clearer chronological context. The possible functional association of a small pot with a ‘cooking place’ is also compelling. Not only does it suggest a

possible role for the vessel, but it may indicate that the feature relates to settled activity. Secondly, the close proximity of the Kensington Church hoard suggests a chronological and/or spatial depth to early first millennium BC activity in the area consistent with evidence from elsewhere for intense activity during the period (e.g. Seager Thomas 2001).

(June 2001)